

HB612 Written Testimony – Ways and Means Committee (2/12 at 1:00 PM)
Public Schools - Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment
Shreya Dinesh - Glenelg High School Student

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Shreya Dinesh, a current sophomore residing in Howard County. I serve as leadership for both the Glenelg High School Student Government and the Howard County Recreation & Parks Board, with both having expressed their interest towards the mental health and safety of public school students. Assisted by concerning statistics, I write to you on behalf of students in Maryland to request a favorable report on House Bill 612.

Social emotional health issues have been affecting us for years. Most notably, the impact has been drastic in the Howard County area, especially during recent times. In the 2019 Report Card of Community Health Indicators, the Howard County Health Department found suicide as the primary reason for mortality in ages 15-19¹. This fact is astounding, to a great degree in a county reputed for its stellar academics and graduation rates.

The truth is, this problem's presence stretches far beyond my county. The consequences of a lack of mental stability continues to have an effect on student's personal health across our state. As The Baltimore Sun explains, 1 in 10 high school students enrolled in our state's public schools have attempted suicide². This means students as young as the ages of 13 or 14 have turned to self-harm as a last resort. When researching further, I was simply dumbstruck. The years of buildup of constant mental health deterioration across our state has been reported on, written about, and grieved; with no adequate response implemented in all Maryland public schools.

We can only do so much as to show you the numbers and cry for help. It is up to you to decide, based on our desperation for improved resources, to take proper action. Therefore, I strongly urge you to consider HB 612, the Lifesavers Bill. Not only does the proposal encourage in-school wellness programs, but it also promotes the use of assemblies and public togetherness; in order to nurture the uniqueness of a student community within a "Lifesaver School". This bill would open numerous doors for all Maryland students, as it normalizes receiving help. By recognizing the schools meeting health and safety requirements as outlined, the bill creates positive reinforcement and precedent surrounding mental health initiatives.

It is imperative for students to begin feeling reassured, a security that can only be brought with your support surrounding proposals such as this one. Accordingly, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB612 from the committee. Thank you for your time.

¹*Community Health Indicators Report Card: 2019*. www.howardcountymd.gov/health/resource/community-health-indicators-report-card. Accessed 10 Feb. 2025.

²Roberts, Angela. "baltimoresun.com." The Baltimore Sun, 5 July 2024, www.baltimoresun.com/2024/07/03/suicide-mental-health-substance-survey-maryland/. Accessed 10 Feb. 2025.